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Message Text

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47
ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-10 /073 W
---------- 103177
R 201013Z MAY 75
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4521
INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 5927

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT FR FT
SUBJECT: TFAI: PRESSURES FOR CHANGE INCREASE

REF: (A) ADDIS 5263 (NOTAL); (B) MOGADISCIO 0730

1. EMBOFF VISITED DJIBOUTI MAY 12-17 TO ASSESS THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE THERE AFTER THE VISIT BY FRENCH MINISTER FOR OVER-SEAS STIRN (CF. REF A) AND TO CLARIFY FRENCH AND AFAR REACTIONS TO EPMG-AFAR DISCUSSIONS (CF. ADDIS 5421 AND 5721). EPMG-AFAR ISSUE WILL BE COVERED SEPTEL.

2. FRENCH HIGH COMMISSIONER DABLANC ADMITTED TO EMBOFF THAT BECAUSE OF VARIOUS EVENTS WITHIN THE LAST SIX MONTHS (KIDNAPPING OF FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN MOGADISCIO, SOMALI ATTACKS ON THE FRENCH TFAIR PRESENCE IN VARIOUS OAU AND ARAB FORA WHICH HAVE BEEN GIVEN A SYMPATHETIC EAR BY OTHER AFRICAN AND ARAB STATES, THE IMPENDING INDEPENDENCE OF THE COMORE ISLANDS, ETC), THE NORMALLY SOMNOLENT DJIBOUTI POLITICAL SCENE WAS BEGINNING TO STIR. THE FRENCH GOVERN-
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MENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE TERRITORIAL COUNCIL, AFAR LEADER ALI

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AFEF BOURHAN, ARE NOW UNDER INCREASED PRESSURE TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF THE FRENCH PRESENCE IN THE TERRITORY AND TO INCLUDE YOUNGER, BETTER EDUCATED AFARS IN ITS POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LIFE.

3. DABLANC STATED THAT IN SPITE OF THE INCIDENTS WHICH PRECEDED STIRN'S VISIT (CF. PARA 3 REF A), THE FRENCH MINISTER ENCOUNTERED NO TROUBLE DURING HIS MAY 1-3 SOJOURN. DABLANC NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT SMALL GROUPS OF AGITATORS (30-50, USUALLY COMPOSED OF THE SAME INDIVIDUALS) WERE UBIQUITOUS THROUGHOUT THE VISIT. THESE AGITATORS WERE HELD AT BAY BY EXTENSIVE SECURITY MEASURES.

4. THE APRIL 30 DEMONSTRATION IN WHICH THE ADMINISTRATOR OF DJIBOUTI DISTRICT WAS INJURED WAS INITIATED BY LA LIQUE POPULAIRE AFRICAINE POUR L' INDEPENDENCE -- LPAI, LED BY AFAR AHMED DINI, AND AFAR STUDENTS FROM TADJOURAH (ALI AREF'S HOME DISTRICT). DEMONSTRATIONS DID NOT PRIMARILY INVOLVE ISSA DISSIDENTS BUT GREW OUT OF PERCEIVED INEQUITIES IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM. STUDENTS DEMANDED MORE EDUCATION AND BETTER SCHOOL CONDITIONS IN TADJOURA AND ELSEWHERE IN AFAR-INHABITED AREAS OF THE TFAI. SEVEN LPAI DEMONSTRATORS WERE ARRESTED, BUT MOST WERE LATER RELEASED.

5. EMBOFF LEFT WITH IMPRESSION THAT THE INCREASED POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAS EXACERBATED THE TFAI DILEMMA FOR THE FRENCH. ALTHOUGH THE FORTHCOMING REOPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL SHOULD REDUCE OR ELIMINATE THE ECONOMIC LIABILITIES OF DJIBOUTI TO FRANCE, THERE ARE NO PREDICTIONS THAT DJIBOUTI WILL QUICKLY BOOM AND BECOME A NET ECONOMIC ASSET. DUE TO THE INCREASING CRITICISM OF CONTINUED FRENCH PRESENCE IN THE TERRITORY, THE FRENCH ARE BEING FORCED TO FACE THE QUESTION OF THE PRICE THEY MAY HAVE TO PAY TO PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO. THEY REALIZE, HOWEVER, THAT AN INDEPENDENT DJIBOUTI IS ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY UNVIABLE WITHOUT OUTSIDE SUPPORT. AFARS TRULY OUTNUMBER ISSAS, SO A FREE VOTE WOULD PROBABLY PRECLUDE UNION OF THE TERRITORY WITH SOMALIA. THE AFAR MAJORITY WOULD PRO-BABLY CHOOSE UNION WITH THE AFAR HINTERLAND IN ETHIOPIA, EXCEPT THAT THE AFARS DEEPLY DISTRUST THE PRESENT "COMMUNIST, ANTI-AFAR" ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT. ETHIOPIA, OF COURSE, HAS MAJOR INTERESTS IN THE DJIBOUTI-ADDIS RAIL LINE AND IN AFAR CONNECTIONS IN THE TFAI WHICH THE FRENCH MUST ALSO CONSIDER.

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6. FRENCH AND AFAR LEADERS INDIVIDUALLY TOLD EMBOFF THAT A READY SOLUTION TO THE TERRITORY'S PROBLEMS WAS NOT APPARENT. THE FRENCH ADMITTED THAT ANOTHER REFERENDUM, SUCH AS THAT HELD IN1966, WAS LIKELY WITHIN 2-3 YEARS (MANY SOURCES PREDICTED IT WOULD COME SOONER). THE FRENCH ARE JUST BECOMING AWARE OF THE GROWING SENTIMENT EVEN AMONG THE AFAR MAJORITY FOR CHANGE, WHETHER IT BE FOR INDEPENDENCE, UNION WITH ETHIOPIA, OR, IN SOME CASES, WITH SOMALIAN OR MERELY INCREASED ECONOMIC BENEFITS WITHIN A FRENCH

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ADMINISTRATION. FRENCH SOURCES AGREED THAT WHATEVER PATH THE TFAI CHOOSES TO TAKE, FRANCE WILL BE QUIDED BY THE POPULAR WILL. FRANCE, HOWEVER, WILL INCREASE ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE TERRITORY IN AN EFFORT TO SHOW THE PEOPLE THAT THE CURRENT STATUS IS THE MOST VIABLE OF THE SEVERAL ALTERNATIVES FOR THE TERRITORY.

7. COMMENT: EVEN IF THE TFAI'S CURRENT STATUS REMAINS UNCHANGED, THE TERRITORY'S INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP WILL CHANGE. HIGH COMMISSIONER DABLANC AND THE YOUTHFUL, ENERGETIC CADRE AROUND HIM ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE CRITICISMS OF ALI AREF, THE CURRENT POLITICAL STIRRINGS, AND THE PROBLEMS THEY BODE FOR THE FUTURE. THE SITUATION, HOWEVER, IS NOT YET CLEAR ENOUGH FOR DABLANC TO MAKE CONCRETE PROPOSALS FOR THAT FUTURE. ALI AREF IS ALMOST UNIVERSALLY REGARDED AS "FRENCH FIRST, AFAR SECOND" ALTHOUGH HIS MORE RATIONAL DETRACTORS ADMIT HE IS, FOR NOW AT LEAST, THE BEST LEADER ON THE SCENE, POPULAR PRSSURES ARE BUILDING, ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNG, EDUCATED AFAR, FOR HIS REMOVAL FROM OFFICE. WHILE ALI AREF SEEMS UNLIKELY TO FALL FROM POWER SOON, THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO WILL LIKELY BRING MUCH GREATER POLITICAL ACTIVITY TO THE TERRITORY, AND INCREASED PUBLIC OPPOSITION AMONG AFAR AS WELL AS ISA TO ALI AREF, HIS FRENCH ADVISORS (WHO ARE HOLD-OVERS FROM THE COLONIAL SERVICE) AND HIS CONSERVATIVE, TRADITIONAL AFAR ENTOURAGE.
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